

JOHN McLEOD CAMPBELL— HERETIC AND SAINT

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THE name of McLeod Campbell will always be familiar to the select few who follow him in writing of the Atonement. For he is the author of "one of the few great books produced by Scottish theological effort"—the verdict of G. D. Henderson.¹ H. R. Mackintosh² went even further—he called McLeod Campbell the greatest of Scottish theologians "to whom more than to any other we owe a spiritual interpretation of the central Christian ideas." This is high praise and yet not too high for the experts are agreed that in *The Nature of the Atonement*, Campbell's greatest work, we have one of the classics in this field of study. If, however, we are unimpressed by such testimony, I would maintain that John McLeod Campbell has another claim upon our attention and indeed upon our affection. For not only was he a theologian but he was also a saint who, if one may use the words without irreverence, when he was reviled reviled not again³ and in his life showed the charity of the Christ whose work and person he tried to understand and interpret. His mind may, at times, have lacked clarity: his heart rarely failed in charity: he was indeed "one never tempted to forget the meekness and gentleness of Christ."⁴ It is sometimes said that heretics and those accused of heresy are more loveable than their accusers. This is certainly true of McLeod Campbell. Thrown out of the Church of Scotland but having the fire in his belly he gathered an independent congregation round him and then, when his pastorate was ended, advised them to join the Barony of Glasgow and be ministered to by his friend, Norman McLeod,⁵ who was to say of Campbell, "I loved and adored him on this side of idolatry. He was my St. Paul." While others may be interested in his classic on atonement theory, this study will be rather of the man himself, this heretic, who was yet orthodox enough to regard schism as a deadly sin. If there is little in the paper about his greatest work, it is not only that I wish to refrain

¹ G. D. Henderson, *The Burning Bush*, p. 160.

² H. R. Mackintosh, *The Christian Apprehension of God*, p. 158.

³ 1st Peter, 2: 23.

⁴ Norman MacLeod on 13th April, 1871, at presentation of testimonial and address.

⁵ Norman MacLeod of the Barony was a cousin of 'his best of friends, beloved John Campbell.' See *Memoir of Norman MacLeod*, p. 182.

from expounding what others have already done, but also because the man himself is such a fascinating character and I find the human side of him of such absorbing interest.

Like many another notable Scot he was a son of the manse, his father being minister of Kilninver and Kilmelford, a wide scattered parish in the hill country of Lorn in Argyll. Dr. Donald Campbell was reckoned one of the Moderate party in his day but his main interest was in his own people and, then, in his own family. John, the eldest child, was born on 4th May 1800 in Ardmaddy House. When only a few weeks old, however, he was taken to the farmhouse above Knipoch, which had been allocated by the heritors to serve as the minister's residence. So Kilninver may fairly claim him for it was there that he and the other two children, Jean and Donald, were reared. Their father had been born near Dunvegan in Skye and educated at King's College, Aberdeen. After four years as minister of Southend in Kintyre he had been presented to the parish of Kilninver and Kilmelford by John, the respected and well-loved 5th Duke of Argyll. There he served for the rest of his life. His wife was Mary MacLeod, a daughter of MacLeod of Raasay.

No romantic tales survive of how John passed his boyhood days. From his *Reminiscences*¹ we can see how he loved the beautiful countryside of Nether Lorn and imagine his boyish pranks in the clachan with the lovely name "the Church at the foot of the water" and his growing awe as he looked out at the noble mountains of Mull aglow in the setting sun. But nothing remains in local tradition. In fact it is his father who is remembered as the minister who once defied the Presbytery of Lorn. An old elder, whom I questioned on the matter, spoke with evident relish of the stand made by a Dr. Campbell against a domineering Presbytery. Others when told of the great place occupied among European theologians by one born in Nether Lorn professed ignorance even of the name of John McLeod Campbell.

Sadder, still, if I may digress for a moment, is the fact that the latest edition of "The Encyclopaedia Britannica" contains no article on him and that, as far as I know, no standard life has ever been written. This is more unpardonable than the local community's forgetfulness. In their defence it may be said that, after all, John left Kilninver at the age of eleven to attend the University of Glasgow, an indication both of the gaps in the Scottish educational system and of the quality of the rural clergy of the time. For the lad had been taught mainly by his father and that creditably for at Glasgow he was accounted a good Latin scholar. In 1812 he attended the Greek class and matriculated by entering his name on

¹ *Reminiscences and Reflections* (London 1873).

the roll. It was at that time open to a student to matriculate in his second year. From the beginning of his academic career he was sure of his calling to be a minister of the Gospel.

The course he took in Arts and Divinity lasted nine years and a further year was spent in Edinburgh whither he had been attracted by Sir William Hamilton. After being licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Lorn in 1821 he spent another four years in Edinburgh, mainly in what would now be called post-graduate work. The question of his going to Oxford was raised, but he refused to entertain the idea when it was explained that this would involve taking an oath to use the Book of Common Prayer in public worship. His studies covered a wider field than was customary for a student of divinity in those days, for we find him taking classes in Natural History, Chemistry, Anatomy, Geology and Political Economy. This was important, for his training in scientific method influenced him when he came to consider Christian doctrine. During this period (in the summer of 1821) he underwent the ordeal of preaching for the first time. In a letter to his sister, by then married and settled in India, he describes the experience. "It was a strange feeling to enter the pulpit of the Church in which I had often sat as a schoolboy. When I found it closed in upon myself and there was no retreating, it was painful and fearful to look on the anxiously expectant faces of my father's parishioners, all crowded into our small church to hear him preach whom some of them remembered as a lisping boy. Every eye was fixed on me and yet there was so much kindness and friendly interest mingled with the curiosity that from the first moment it encouraged me."¹ His Gaelic proved to be better than they expected of one so long "out of the country" and the sermon was delivered "without my paper." One can be sure that he was glad to deliver his first sermon in his father's church, for one of the endearing things about McLeod Campbell was his strong sense of family loyalty and particularly his affection for his father, whom he often addresses as "my dearest friend." Mary Campbell having died in 1806, the whole care of the family devolved upon the father and by John, at least, he was rewarded with extraordinary devotion. Most of us have long known of the father's eloquence in the Assembly when his son was on trial and of the tribute he then paid to the suspected heretic. But their letters show that this was merely the expression in public, the welling up and overflowing, of the deep-seated affection and respect which each felt for the other.

In May 1825 John was presented by the Duke of Argyll to the parish of Rhu near Cardross. Gaelic was not regularly preached but the language had not, by then, died out in that quarter of Dumbarton and there were

¹ *Memorials of John McLeod Campbell, D.D.* (London 1877). Vol. i, p. 11.

a few families able, and proud, to welcome their new minister in his mother tongue. The parish included the rising town of Helensburgh, which from being a village in 1790 with a population of a hundred inhabitants had become, by 1825, a town with sixteen hundred people resident in it. The parish church, it may be mentioned, was over two miles distant from the new town.

Settled in this delightful parish of exquisite scenery, with the Gareloch at the door, the dark hills beyond Loch Long to the North, the expanse of the Firth to the South and Rosneath, one of the Argyll "castles," across the water, McLeod Campbell girded himself to the task. He would be a true pastor to those people whom patron and Presbytery and God's call had entrusted to his charge. I stress this not because such resolution was unusual among the Scottish clergy but because it was out of this pastoral concern that he was led to stress certain elements of the faith and thereby lay himself open to a charge of heresy. From the beginning he set two objectives¹ before him which can be summarised as :

- (a) resolution to study the Word of God letting that Word be its own interpreter,
- (b) determination to make every visit a means of directly commending Christ.

He traversed the parish, visiting and holding diets for catechising at the numerous farmhouses up the Gareloch and Loch Long to Gorton, gathered round him a promising group of young people and even on a steamboat going up Loch Goil with a funeral party he eagerly seized an opportunity to get the mourners assembled and spoke to them for an hour and a half on the simplicity of faith. Which may sound forced but the funeral was that of Isabella Campbell of Fernicarry,² a young girl of nineteen, who, in another branch of her Lord's Church, might have been canonised.

From all these and other contacts in the course of his pastoral duties, the parish minister of Rhu discovered that religion was not affording his people the consolation and the challenge which it should. They did not give the impression of "enjoying" their God which, everyone knew, was one aspect of man's chief end. Joy, the joy so stressed by the Apostle of whom they heard most, was absent. The catechism was learned by rote but the warmth of true conviction was sadly lacking. Uncertainty and lack of confidence, distrust and fear on the other hand were never far below the surface. Thomas Erskine of Linlathen might urge, "Believe

¹ Letter prefaced to *Notes of Sermons* (3 volumes. Lithographed. Paisley, 1831).

² *Peace in Believing*, by Robert Story (Greenock, 1829).

the Gospel and because you believe the doctrine do the will " but the country people had little conception of the fullness of the Gospel and their conventional morality was largely governed by prudential motives. And always nagging at the mind encouraging introspection were the questions, " Am I of the elect ? " " Can I be sure ? " Some day it may be possible to make a dispassionate statement of the influence of the doctrine of election, as popularly conceived on the life of Scotland in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Burns has given us one side in his terrible satire of Holy Willie's Prayer, first printed in 1789. The reader overhears Holy Willie at his prayers :

" O Thou that in the heavens does dwell
Wha, as it pleases best thyself,
Sends ane to heaven and ten to hell
A' for thy glory
And no for ony gude or ill
They've done before thee."

It is satire, brilliant satire, but the ideas expressed must, even in milder form, have caused untold misery. Enough for speculation. McLeod Campbell was a parish minister faced with a practical situation. His interest in doctrine was not merely that of the student : it was primarily that of the pastor. Bertrand Russell said of one of the famous Trevelyan family, " What is in books appears to him interesting whereas what is only in real life is negligible." While some theologians may be obsessed by what is " in books " not so this man, either now in beautiful Rhu or later in the baleful slums of Glasgow. Of William James it was said that he was a good philosopher because he was a real human being. *Mutatis mutandis* the same may be said of McLeod Campbell. As he himself wrote a year before his death referring to his early ventures into theology " the path here was not speculative but practical."¹ He knew that the orthodoxy of the time, to which his people had been subject and which was indeed stressed in the Westminster *Confession* and the *Catechisms* was based on one great fundamental doctrine—the Sovereignty of God. Everything, creation, providence, revelation, salvation, predestination depended, was made to depend, upon that " most sovereign dominion." Everything is for the glory of God. In chapter III we have the Confession's teaching on election under the heading " Of God's Eternal Decree." After an attempt to safeguard man's free will and his power of choice the writer goes on to state " By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus pre-

¹ *Reminiscences and Reflections*, p. 129.

destinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed ; and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished." Reprobation, Calvin's *decretum horribile*, is clearly taught. The elect are called to faith in Christ, justified, adopted and sanctified "but the elect only." The rest God was pleased "to pass by and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin." The whole was a scheme magnificently logical yet surely too exact and, like all schemes whether of theologians or politicians, it tended to lose the personal element. In Edwin Muir's phrase—"The Word made flesh here made word again."¹ Or as the contemporary Erskine of Linlathen put it, Calvinism in Scotland had been so cruelly developed that men were utterly incapable of understanding theology phrased in personal terms.

In reaction or in revolt, if you like, McLeod Campbell tried to show his people that religion was primarily a personal relationship. As he put it in one of his sermons later published in *Responsibility for the Gift of Eternal Life*² you are to "know that you have to do not with rules and precepts or opinions but with a real person, a living God, who does at this moment as truly think of you as if you saw Him in this room. He is here. He is saying, 'Oh, that my people would trust me. O that my people would meet my love.' " The preacher urges his hearers to believe in God's love and believing have joy. Preaching at Rhu on *2nd Thessalonians* iii, v. 5 ("And the Lord direct your hearts unto the love of God and the patient waiting for Christ ") he affirmed "If I were to select any expression from the Bible as characteristic of my teaching it would be this verse. My great object has been to direct your hearts to the love of God."³ The glory of God is this—that He is love. Men throw this love to a distance, they cast a mist round it, they limit it but this is what we see in Christ. He urges them to believe and accept so that they may have comfort and peace. The way has been opened; through repentance *any* man can avail himself of God's prior removal of the barrier and can know the joy and peace of which the New Testament speaks as fruits of the Spirit. Thus he can possess assurance.

That these sermons,⁴ preached in the years 1826-1830 are demanding is true. They are long, the reasoning is close, the sentences involved, the

¹ Edwin Muir, *One Foot in Eden*, p. 47.

² *Responsibility for the Gift of Eternal Life*, (London, 1873), p. 107.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 184.

⁴ *Sermons published from notes taken in shorthand*, (Paisley, 1831). These three lithographed volumes include material later printed in *Responsibility for the Gift of Eternal Life* (London, 1873). *Fragments of Truth* (Edinburgh, 1898, 4th Edition), contains sermons of the period 1831-1856 along with two by Erskine of Linlathen and two by A. J. Scott.

illustrations few. Indeed we may echo the words of his father, "Man, you've a queer way of putting things." Yet even now, as you read through part of the faded neglected volumes you feel the heartbeat of a preacher eager to give his people a grasp of the great fact "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life." Such preaching is commonplace today, accepted as evangelical and scriptural and that is part of our debt to this man. Yet when rumours of it reached the Evangelicals of Campbell's time they scented heresy.

It was in the summer of 1827 that he first realised that "offence was taken" with what he taught. His "summer parishioners", those holiday-makers from Glasgow, who were even then beginning to patronise the shores of Clyde and Gareloch, would naturally discuss the sermons they had heard in Rhu and on their return home mention to their own pastors the emphasis given by the minister of Row to assurance. He for his part did not want to be misunderstood, and so when opportunity offered he tried to make his position clear. Thus he found himself explaining his views to Glasgow ministers during two successive weeks in December 1827. First, he was invited to be the guest of a theological society when a paper on "The Assurance of Faith" was read, and then he was guest preacher for one of the charitable institutions in the city. What exactly he said on either occasion we don't know but we know the result—the ministers of Glasgow were perturbed. "For many Sabbaths the ministers of Glasgow preached on this." "The Glasgow ministers have taken alarm," he wrote to Robert Story, "there is a spirit of hostility stirring up." He always dated the crystallisation of opposition to the second occasion mentioned above.¹ As the months passed he could feel the opposition growing but encouragement came from contacts with two men, who, by very different methods, had worked their way out of the prison of the orthodox system—Edward Irving² and Thomas Erskine of Linlathen—and from the results of his work among the young people of his parish. "I am getting on well with my young people," he wrote to his father, "I meet them Sunday after sermon. There are about thirty—very promising."³

Yet he was disturbed by the criticism and forced by it to examine more closely the foundation for assurance. So he was led to consider the extent of the atonement. "And it soon appeared to me manifest that unless Christ had died *for all* and unless the Gospel announced Him as the gift of God to every human being . . . there was no foundation in

¹ *Reminiscences*, p. 20. *Memorials*, i, p. 49.

² *Memorials*, i, p. 51. *Edward Irving and his Circle*, A. L. Drummond, p. 111.

³ Cf. *Memorials*, i, p. 31.

the record of God for the Assurance which I demanded and which I saw to be essential to true holiness." The subject matter of the Gospel is universal atonement and pardon through the blood of Christ. "I do not remember that I ever read the words: 'God so loved the world. . . .' 'He, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man,' otherwise than in their natural and obvious sense."

"I remember, at an early stage in my brief ministry in Rhu my sense of violent striving for logical consistency, when a very devoted minister . . . maintained that when it is said that God loved the world it is the elect world that is meant."¹ Some of his critics went so far as to accuse him of antinomianism: he quotes them as saying, "If all are forgiven then we need not repent . . . and we may do as we please." What indeed, he mused, did repentance mean to such people? It was very far from being real sorrow for sin. Is there here a glimmering of the thought that men cannot truly repent and that the Mediator must do it for them? Certainly he emphasises how grievously repentance is misunderstood.

Yet it was the phrase "a Gospel that proclaimed universal atonement and pardon" which caused offence, even to some who sensed why he laid so much stress on assurance. For the phrase "universal atonement and pardon" had been much used over a century before when part of the Marrow doctrine had been condemned by the Assembly of 1720. A word may be said about this now forgotten controversy and the book which gave rise to it, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*. This work first published in 1645 consisted largely of extracts from the writings of first and second generation of Reformers. It was brought to the notice of the people of Scotland by Thomas Boston of Ettrick and by James Hog of Carnock, who contributed a preface to the first Scottish edition of 1718.² The *Marrow* was, in effect, a summary of evangelical doctrine with its main emphasis on justification by faith: a sinner can be instantly saved by accepting the Gospel of God's redeeming mercy. As one of the leading Marrowmen, Ralph Erskine put it, "The free revelation of grace in Christ is the very womb of the Church that brings forth her children; but nowadays the Gospel doctrine is brought under much disparagement . . . as if it were some new dangerous scheme." (Quoted in A. R. MacEwen, *The Erskines*, page 61.) The emphasis placed on man's power to respond to the Gospel and the earnestness with which it was proclaimed led to criticism and a public attack on the teaching of the "Marrowmen" by Principal Hadow of St. Andrews brought matters to a head. The General Assembly of 1719 instructed a Committee to inquire into the teaching of the *Marrow* and

¹ *Reminiscences and Reflections*, p. 154.

² *Memoirs of Thomas Boston* (ed. George H. Morrison), p. 348. *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, Ed. by C. G. McCrie (Glasgow, 1902).

in 1720 a report was presented to the Assembly. This consisted of passages from the book, gathered under five heads which the Assembly went on to declare contrary to the Scriptures, the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechism*. So an Act was passed, commonly called Act 5 of 1720—which was to play a significant part in McLeod Campbell's case. After the statement of what was considered offensive doctrine it went on, "and therefore the General Assembly hereby strictly prohibit and discharge all ministers of the Church either, by preaching, writing or printing to recommend the said book or in discourse to say anything in favour of it." More specifically the Assembly condemned the Marrow teaching that assurance is of the essence of faith and that the atonement is universal in its scope, the heading in the latter case being "Of Universal Atonement and Pardon." Before moving on let us note what Act 5 was: a simple Act of Assembly giving instruction to ministers regarding a specific work. No one suggested that it should be sent down to Presbyteries under the Barrier Act. True, Ebenezer Erskine warned that it would be productive of much evil but even he did not suggest a reference to Presbyteries.

To return now to McLeod Campbell we may agree that his use of the terms "universal atonement and pardon" was unwise but he himself always maintained¹ that the Act of 1720 had nothing to do with him. The time is near when he will have to consider such matters for definite action is about to be taken. On 30th March 1830 certain of the parishioners of Rhu, twelve in number, presented a memorial to the Presbytery of Dumbarton making specific charges against their minister.² These were

- (a) that "certain unsound pernicious doctrines contrary to Scripture and the Standards of the National Church had for some time been constantly preached in Rhu Church." Later it was stated that these doctrines were "universal atonement and pardon" and "assurance is of the essence of faith."
- (b) that discord was being produced in the parish as a result.
- (c) that youth were in danger of being corrupted.

The first point of the attack we shall see developed later. With regard to the second we may note that there was another memorial presented to the Presbytery on the same day, a memorial signed by eighty householders who testified that their minister had not been without success in his labours. He had continued to press on them the necessity of resting in Christ alone for salvation, of departing from all iniquity and of living

¹ *Memorials*, i, p. 71.

² A full account of the trial will be found in *The Whole Proceedings in the Case of Rev. John McLeod Campbell*: R. B. Lusk, Greenock, 1831. The libel is printed p. 1-8.

in the hope of a blessed immortality. Indeed he had gone about his duties with complete devotion, his communicants' class was full, lives were being changed by his preaching and the parishioners regularly visited. The Presbytery only received the second memorial after one of the elders had insisted on this being done but the reluctance must not be taken as an indication of prejudice for two earlier complaints against McLeod Campbell had been dismissed by the Presbytery on the ground that they were not in order.

Faced with these charges against one of their number the brethren appointed a committee to confer with the "accused" but, though he met them, he refused to discuss his views on doctrine and worship. On the committee reporting failure to achieve anything the Presbytery asked the discontented parishioners if they were willing to convert the memorial into a libel. The representative elder from Cardross, Mr. Dunlop of Keppoch and Robert Story, the minister of Rosneath, opposed this move and asked that enquiries should be made regarding the character of the memorialists and the steps they had taken to acquaint their minister of their grievances. When a vote was taken the Presbytery adopted the first motion and Mr. Dunlop thereupon appealed to the General Assembly. At the last minute the appeal was withdrawn and the case was returned to the Presbytery with authority to receive the libel, or do whatever else was necessary to investigate the charges, in view not only of the gravity of the situation but also because the doctrines imputed to McLeod Campbell had been condemned by the General Assembly of 1720. The Presbytery, having secured the necessary consent to consider the case as one of libel, decided to hold a parochial visitation in Rhu on the 8th July. The heritors, elders and heads of families were invited to appear and acquaint the court of anything amiss in their minister. So the fathers and brethren foregathered in the parish church and at once found themselves involved in argument. McLeod Campbell had to preach so that his "matter" could be judged as sound or otherwise. He said that he must have three hours for his sermon: the weaker brethren said that the preaching was a mere matter of form and that they would not listen to him above an hour. At last a compromise was reached and the whole service lasted two hours.¹ When it was all over the Presbytery expressed its abhorrence of the doctrine contained in two sentences of the sermon:— (1) "God so loves every child of Adam with a love the measure of which is to be seen in the Cross of Christ." (2) "The person who knows that Christ died for every child of Adam is the person who is in a condition to say to every human being, 'Let there be peace with you, peace between you and your God'."

¹ *The Whole Proceedings*, p. xix, f.

The libel was officially served on McLeod Campbell on 9th September¹ and he was instructed to give in his answers at once.

The relevant parts² of a long document are "that albeit the doctrine of universal atonement and pardon through the death of Christ, as also the doctrine that assurance is of the essence of faith and necessary to salvation are contrary to the Holy Scriptures and to the *Confession of Faith*, approved by the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland, and ratified by law in 1690; and, moreover, condemned by the 5th Act of the General Assembly held in the year 1720, yet true it is that you hold and have repeatedly promulgated and expressed the aforesaid doctrines." This was the major proposition: the minor proposition gave instances of the occasions when the offensive doctrines were proclaimed, together with a list of witnesses. The libellers and their supporters in the Presbytery were to maintain that if a doctrine was at variance with the *Confession* it was at variance with the Scriptures for the *Confession* was an exact, complete and true transcript of Scriptural doctrine. Had not every minister to sign a statement at his ordination that he believed "in the whole doctrine contained in the *Confession*"? When the Presbytery tried the case one member made the point thus, "by my subscription I am bound to receive the Bible in the sense of the *Westminster Confession*." Another was more blunt, "we are far from appealing to the Word of God on this ground; it is by the *Confession* we must stand; by it we hold our livings. Mr. Campbell has not now to come and tell what the Bible says. When the Presbytery of Dumbarton inducted him he subscribed to the *Confession of Faith* and the parish has the right to have the Scriptures interpreted according to the *Confession of Faith*."³ There it was—the authority of the *Confession* was equal to that of the Scriptures and besides, there was the Act of 1720 which specifically condemned the doctrines of "universal atonement" and "assurance as being of the essence of faith." Unfortunately McLeod Campbell's terminology coincided with that of the Act. Whether more reflection on his part would have produced a different terminology and so changed the situation is doubtful. But leaving aside the Act of 1720 were his doctrines contrary to the *Confession* and to the Scriptures? When the case reached the Synod McLeod Campbell took up his true ground of defence—the *Confession* must be tested like his own doctrines by the truth of Scripture. "I am not admitting that the doctrines I teach are inconsistent with the standards: on the contrary. But I feel that to take this ground would be failing in duty to the truth of God." The *Scots Confession*, he reminded the Synod, had one magnificent phrase;

¹ *Memorials*, i, p. 70.

² *Ibid.*, i, p. 70.

³ *The Whole Proceedings*, p. xxix.

"if any man will note in this our *Confession* any article or sentence repugnant to God's holy word that it would please him of his gentleness . . . to admonish us of the same in writing and we, upon our honour and fidelity . . . do promise unto him satisfaction from the mouth of God, that is from His Holy Scriptures, or else reformation of that which he shall prove to be amiss."¹ Here, said McLeod Campbell, you have a Confession, always authoritative in the Kirk, saying clearly that the primary authority is that of Scripture. "When the Church says to both ministers and people, 'This is my Confession of Faith: if anything in it appear to you inconsistent with the Word of God I am prepared to go with you to the Word of God to settle the matter' then does the Church speak according to her place. But if instead of this she says, 'This I have fixed to be the meaning of the Word of God and you cannot take any other meaning without being excluded from my communion, and to entitle me so to exclude you I do not need to prove to you that what you hold and teach is contrary to the Scriptures, it is quite enough that it is contrary to my Confession of Faith,' I say if the Church of Christ use this language she no longer remembers her place as a Church." The Church cannot claim that at any period she contains *all* the light that is in her living head. "This thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind I press forward"—the Apostolic word, says Campbell, applies as much to the Church as to the individual Christian. And "if a Confession of Faith were something to stint and stop the Church's growth in light and knowledge and to say, 'Thus far shalt thou go and no further' then a Confession of Faith would be the greatest curse that ever befell a church." Whatever may be true of the Confession, there is no word in Scripture limiting the Atonement: on the contrary, there is no barrier to any sinner's return. "Let me entreat you . . . that you be found realising the awefulness of sitting in judgement not on Confessions of Faith or Acts of General Assemblies but on the oracles of the living God."² These words from the peroration of his speech to the Synod indicated his general attitude and I have anticipated a little because he himself considered this Synod speech the clearest statement of his position.

When the Presbytery in spite of an able plea by Robert Story on Campbell's behalf, found the libel relevant and then proved he appealed to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr on the ground that the major proposition of the libel was not relevant. The libel consisted of the major and minor propositions, the proof of the minor and the conclusion. The major proposition set out the offending doctrines as being contrary to Scripture and

¹ *John Knox "History of the Reformation in Scotland,"* Ed. Dickinson, Vol. ii, p. 258.

² *Memorials*, i, p. 85.

the *Confession of Faith* and especially condemned by the 5th Act of Assembly, 1720: the minor asserted that these had been repeatedly promulgated by McLeod Campbell. This he would not deny though he held that some statements in the proof, which supported the minor proposition, were inaccurate.

The Synod dismissed the appeal at its meeting on 13th April 1831 and affirmed the judgment of the Presbytery while referring certain other matters to the Assembly. Against this finding there were three dissidents; John Wylie, minister of Carlisle dissented and complained while Story and Campbell himself appealed to the Assembly. The proceedings at the Synod, where almost all went out when Campbell's advocate spoke, depressed the accused and on his return home he wrote to his father that he could "expect nothing but the most awful things from the Assembly."¹

It was a bad time to be accused of heresy. For here, as two years later in a lower Court when Edward Irving was accused of heresy, Moderates and Evangelicals found something on which they could unite, congratulating each other "that though they might differ in point of polity they could combine to cast out a man who believed that the Creator loved all His creatures."² We have Dr. Chalmers as authority that the Moderates were not half as excited as the Evangelicals. Campbell had been allied to neither party and his attack on static doctrine had offended one side while his "enthusiasm" tended to alienate his father's friends among the Moderates. The hearing began on the 24th May and lasted till 6 a.m. on the 25th. The Assembly was not seen at its best here and of some speakers one can only reiterate what Dryden said of Jeremy Collier, "I will not say the zeal of God's house has eaten him up but I am sure it has devoured part of his good manners and civility."

John McLeod Campbell was represented by an advocate, Thomas Carlyle, but he himself made the major plea for a reversal of the judgments passed by the lower courts. In this, as in the speech in reply to the debate on the relevancy of the libel, he took his stand upon the authority of Scripture.³ The *Westminster Confession* and the Act of 1720 had authority, though the latter was not a law of the Church, but they were "altogether subordinate to the Word of God." Nothing can be held heretical except on the express ground that it is contrary to the Word of God." To that there must be continual reference: those who judge in a cause such as this must make it their standard. Yet this was precisely what those who spoke subsequently refused to do. H. J. Robertson, the advocate for the

¹ *Memorials*, i, p. 78.

² Cunningham, *Church History of Scotland*, Vol. ii, p. 447.

³ *A Full Report of the Proceedings in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in the Case of the Rev. John McLeod Campbell* (Greenock, 1831), p. 41 f.

libellers, maintained that the doctrines were contrary to the *Westminster Confession*, which every member of the Assembly was in conscience bound to believe and uphold. Dr. Fleming of Old Kilpatrick argued that the Church must stand by its compact with the State under which it must teach what is set out in the Westminster documents. One finds little in the speech of Dr. Barr, who had been Moderator of the Synod when the appeal was heard except violent prejudice. It was Dr. Cook, leader of the Moderates, who summed up the position most clearly and expressed what the majority must have felt. It is not unfair to paraphrase as follows :— Here is the libel and there is the *Confession* and we have to decide whether the propositions in the libel are contrary to the *Confession*.

After the long discussion the Assembly dismissed the appeals dissent and complaint then reaffirmed the sentences of the Synod and Presbytery finding the libel relevant. Then came the question of what to do next. And here one may question the wisdom or the justice of what was done. The Assembly was faced with a choice, either to carry on and hear the evidence set out in the minor proposition or to adjourn. Members confessed that their bodies and minds were so exhausted that they were quite incapable of coming to any right conclusion. It was only that day that the printed evidence had come into their hands. Thomas Chalmers took no part in the debate because he said it would take him a month to master the evidence. But those in charge of the proceedings were determined to bring the case to a conclusion and so a timid motion for adjournment was negatived without a division, "upon which a very great number of the members went away." Slightly more than one-third of the commissioners remained to hear the specific charges. There were ten of these in the original libel : the Presbytery had found one not relevant and two not proven. On the seven that remained, counsel for McLeod Campbell addressed the Assembly and Dr. Hamilton replied for the Presbytery. In a speech which differed from his earlier one by its studied attempt to be fair Dr. Cook suggested that it would suffice if the accused were deposed from the parish of Rhu and declared ineligible to receive a call, or presentation, to any parish without the special authority of some future Assembly. This did not meet with approval and Dr. Cook then moved that Mr. Campbell "be deposed from the office of the ministry and prohibited and discharged from exercising the same or any part thereof." The counter-motion that he be suspended "sine die" found little support and by 119 votes to 6 the Assembly agreed to deposition. It was 6 a.m. on the morning of the 25th May.

One may note in passing two features of the debate this night. One was

old Dr. Donald Campbell's speech, strengthened, one would have thought by a petition from 420 persons in the parish of Row praying that their minister might be allowed to continue his fruitful labours among them. He ended, "Moderator, I am not afraid for my son, though his brethren cast him out. The Master whom he serves will not forsake him and, while I live, I will never be ashamed to be father of so holy and blameless a son."

The serious business was lightened by the Assembly Clerk's *lapsis linguae*. He had been appealed to on some matter of procedure and, in the excitement, made a reply quite the opposite of what he intended—that those doctrines of Mr. Campbell would remain and flourish long after the Church of Scotland had perished and been forgotten.

Erskine of Linlathen whispered to those sitting behind him, "This spake he not of himself but being high priest he prophesied."

Following on the Assembly's decision the Presbytery of Lorn required Dr. Campbell to read from his pulpit at Kilninver a condemnation of his son's position. This the old man promptly refused to do. It is this high-spirited action that lives in local tradition.

The bearing of the deposed heretic after his expulsion was one of extreme dignity. On the Sunday following the expulsion he went to Rhu and there, in a field beside the church, addressed a great congregation of parishioners and neighbours. His sermon was a simple evangelical address without a single reference to what had passed: there was no word of recrimination or complaint. "And so," wrote Dr. J. H. Leckie, "his well-loved ministry ended on a note of peace and quietness such as showed rare self-control in a man who had his share of Celtic passion." Shortly thereafter he left the parish and did not return to the shores of the Gareloch till the closing years of his life."

What had he to hold on to? "All I can cleave to is the grand law of the spiritual world . . . that all things work together for good to them that love God, so encouraging myself to go into the darkness abiding in the love of God."

Where was he to serve? He was an orphan, without an ecclesiastical home. The Church of England was to give him many friends like Canon Vaughan, Kingsley and F. D. Maurice but the *Thirty-Nine Articles* he could not accept. A new sect was out of the question for he regarded schism as a deadly sin. In 1834 an attempt was made to induce him to join Irving's new church: friends like Carlyle, his counsel in 1834, had been attracted to the new community and would have been glad to welcome Campbell among them. But though he retained a warm affection for Irving and was able to help and comfort the latter when he came to

Glasgow to die, he would not cast in his lot with the new sect.¹ Indeed he was ahead of his time in cherishing a wide catholicity which would have made him at home in ecumenical circles today. When in 1871 he received a presentation from representatives of the three principal Presbyterian Churches and the Episcopal Church he wrote, and it was one of his last letters, of the thankfulness he felt "for having been saved from any temptation to attempt to found a sect ; cherishing a catholicity with which such an attempt would have been incompatible."²

There remained one way : he would be a minister of the Gospel independent of denomination. As such, he carried out preaching tours in the Highlands, in Argyll and Skye,³ drawing large crowds to hear him even in places where the clergy were suspicious or openly hostile. The people recognised his passion for souls, his only motive in undertaking these arduous labours. It was this which sustained him during the 25 years while he acted as minister of an independent chapel in Partick. It was a task in some ways alien to his tradition and upbringing yet he felt happy in the work, preaching three times a Sunday, exercising pastoral care over a congregation that contained many poor fellow-Highlanders unlikely to find a welcome in the more fashionable congregations of the city. And all the time he meditated on the great theme of the Atonement. Reconciliation had been effected by Christ : he knew this in himself and he had seen the results of preaching the fact. But how had Christ done this? The fact was evident. What theory could account for it? So he began not with some ideas based on philosophy but with the Christian experience of reconciliation : in Professor E. P. Dickie's phrase, "He was of the right type of existentialist."⁴ The theory he gradually worked out during the years in Glasgow till in 1856 he published *The Nature of the Atonement*, "an example of the best kind of theological writing, in which a great soul wrestles with a great theme."⁵ I quote what George S. Hendry wrote not because McLeod Campbell needs a testimonial but because it illustrates what all succeeding writers on the same great theme have found viz., that *The Nature of the Atonement* is not only a classic of theology but also a great work of devotion.⁶ James Denney who was very critical of such theories as McLeod Campbell's wrote, "Of all the books that have ever been written on the atonement . . . McLeod Campbell's is probably that which is most completely inspired by the spirit of the truth with which it

¹ *Memorials*, i, p. 103, 115f.

² *Memorials*, ii, p. 311.

³ *Memorials*, i, p. 96f, for his letters from Skye, etc. *Memorials*, i, p. 109.

⁴ *Introduction to The Nature of the Atonement* (London, 1959).

⁵ *Theology Today*, April, 1960.

⁶ H. R. Mackintosh, *Some Aspects of Christian Belief*, p. 80.

deals.”¹ “In speculative power he cannot compare to Schleiermacher nor in historical learning to Ritschl and sometimes he writes as badly as either: but he walks in the light all the time and everything he touches lives.”²

The work of Christ is treated under two aspects: that in which He is God’s representative to man and that in which He is man’s representative before God, “His dealing with God on behalf of men.” “Assuming the Incarnation I have sought to realise the Divine mind in Christ as perfect sonship towards God and perfect brotherhood towards men.”³ The work of Christ is thus twofold: Campbell’s thought on the first part whereby we have a revelation of the Father’s nature and will shows little that is original. The distinctive features appear when we come to consider Christ’s work as man’s representative. McLeod Campbell had long revolted against the idea that penal suffering entered into the atonement. Yet there was an objective element and he argues that this was a perfect repentance for all the sin of man. “This confession . . . must have been a perfect Amen in humanity to the judgment of God on the sin of man.”⁴ The only person who could do this was Christ in His divine humanity. He did it and in presenting the adequate sorrow and repentance which men could not offer for themselves He absorbed the sin of humanity. The idea that adequate repentance is all the satisfaction God requires came from a casual suggestion in Jonathan Edwards’ *Satisfaction for Sin* (Chapter II).⁵ This suggestion, dismissed by Edwards himself as scarcely worth considering, was developed by McLeod Campbell and so came to form the basis of his theory in one of its main aspects. From the beginning the theory was attacked by those who found it hard to understand how Christ could be penitent for the sins of others especially when He was sinless Himself. It was indeed fifty years before another theologian took up McLeod Campbell’s central thought and developed it. But even in the form in which it is set forth by R. C. Moberley (and also by his son, W. H. Moberley) it has gained few adherents. It is good that we should be reminded, as E. P. Dickie points out, that Christ identified Himself with His fellows and was able to enter into their experiences yet most have felt that there is an air of “psychological unreality”⁶ about vicarious penitence as the central thing in the Atonement. In spite of all this even the severest critics acknowledge the spiritual quality of the work, a new

¹ James Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London, 1917), p. 120.

² *Op. cit.*

³ *The Nature of the Atonement*, xvii f (2nd edition).

⁴ *The Nature of the Atonement* (2nd edition), p. 135-136.

⁵ *Satisfaction for Sin*, Chapter ii, 1-3.

⁶ H. R. Mackintosh, *Some Aspects of Christian Belief*, p. 93.

edition of which was issued in 1959 with an introduction by Professor E. P. Dickie.

McLeod Campbell also concerned himself with the problems of revelation, science and religion, social reform, etc., being much encouraged by his correspondence with progressive thinkers in England. These, as already indicated, had a high regard for his views. Fortunately he lived long enough to see a change come over the Church of his fathers and, as J. D. Vaughan wrote, "he deserved not only that this pacific revolution should come about but that he himself should live to witness it." In 1868 his *alma mater* conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity; "thoughtful men in all the Churches . . . began to recognise in him one of those teachers whose influence, slowly but surely, affects the religious faith of their day and generation"¹; no longer was he called heretic for a change had come and in the freer atmosphere, which he had done so much to create, it was evident that Christ's work could be conceived in ethical and personal terms; his view of the *Confession* was about to become that of the great majority of Presbyterians, his emphasis on the Divine love that claims the "whole man" one of the mainsprings of evangelical preaching and social reform.

On 13th April 1871, a year before his death and on the fortieth anniversary of his appearance at the bar of the Synod, a number of his friends met him at Edward Caird's house in Glasgow and made a presentation on behalf of his admirers. The address at this simple ceremony was given by Norman MacLeod of the Barony and indicates very clearly how the one-time heretic was now regarded. "We desire to express the conviction that your labours and example have been the means of deepening religious thought and life in our country; that your influence has been a source of strength and light to the Churches and that in your writings, as in your words, you have ever united independence of mind with humility and reverence for divine truth and deep spiritual insight with the purity of Christian love."²

¹ Memorial Sermon, *The Risen Christ*, preached by Robert H. Story, 3rd March, 1872 (MacLehose, Glasgow, 1872).

² *Contemporary Review*, June, 1878.

³ *Memorials*, ii, p. 299.